



Journal of Southeast Asian American
Education and Advancement

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

Volume 5 | Issue 1

Article 4

2010

Letter to My Unborn Self

Saymoukda Vongsay
Saymoukda@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea>



Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vongsay, Saymoukda (2010) "Letter to My Unborn Self," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.7771/2153-8999.1005

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea/vol5/iss1/4>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.
Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).



Volume 5 (2010)

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed
scholarly journal
published by the
National Association
for the Education &
Advancement of
Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Letter to My Unborn Self

by
Saymoukda D. Vongsay

Your mother will slap you because out of frustration you'll yell, "Why can't you just learn English?" So what. You're supposed to act as translator at the welfare office. At the grocery stores. At your parent-teacher conferences. This is why they'll raise you bi-lingual in this strange country. On the fourteenth year of your life, you'll be blindsided by the fact that you had a second brother. Don't blame yourself for not knowing. Blame pain and guilt for taking residence in the hearts of your parents the night their second son died in the hospital. Blame their need to forget and their reluctance to heal, to even tell you his name. Be thankful that they didn't give up on having more children after him because then you wouldn't be born.

When you're five years old, your uncle's friend Tom will hurt you, coercing his grown man tongue into your mouth when no one is looking. Tell your uncle so he will beat the shit out of Tom. Don't blame yourself. Don't blame your uncle. Finish the weekend work your third grade teacher sends you home with and go to bed early on Friday nights so that you can wake up two hours before dawn. Don't wear your good clothes. It's only the cucumber fields. Try to daydream about Saturday morning cartoons as you move down the rows, dragging your white bucket behind you. Only pick the ones as big as your hand or your parents won't get paid. Remember to bring a box of facial tissue with you when you go to pick up your mother at the Christmas wreath factory. Don't be disgusted when she cups your face with her dusty sap-dried hands, then kisses you. Fall asleep on the ride home, your head on her lap, and dream of a better life for her.

About the Author

Vongsay is the Lao American author of *No Regrets*, a collection of poetry and haikus published by Baby Rabbit Publishing. Her work can be read in publications such as *Altra Magazine*, *The University Register*, *Hmong Today*, and *Bakka Literary Journal*. A Minnesota-based spoken word poet, she has performed nationally, having shared the stage with nationally acclaimed American artists, and internationally in Italy and Japan. She has worked with the Anchorage Urban League of Young Professionals lecturing and performing at the university level and at local high schools to urge voter registration and civic engagement and also served as liaison between local government and the Southeast Asian community regarding public policy.



SOME RIGHTS RESERVED Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the **Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement**, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or **JSAAEA**.

Vongsay – Letter to My Unborn Self



Volume 5 (2010)

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed
scholarly journal
published by the
National Association
for the Education &
Advancement of
Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Editor

Dr. Wayne E. Wright
University of Texas, San Antonio

Associate Editors

Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry
University of Hawaii

Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam
California State University, Long Beach

Book Review Editor

Dr. Vichet Chhuon
University of Minnesota

Creative Works Editor

Bryan Thao Worra
Lao Assistance Center

Special Advisor

Gregory Green
Curator, Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Cornell University Library

Editorial Assistant

Kathleen Langham
University of Texas, San Antonio

Comments and questions for the editorial staff may be directed to jsaaea@lists.sis.utsa.edu

Editorial Review Board

Dr. Carl L. Bankston III
Tulane University

Dr. Phala Chea
Lowell Public Schools

Dr. Loan Dao
Cancer Prevention Institute of California

Dr. Sophal Ear
U.S. Naval Postgraduate School

Dr. Samlong Inthaly
Minneapolis Public Schools

Dr. Kevin K. Kumashiro
University of Illinois, Chicago

Dr. Pollie Bith-Melander
Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center

Dr. George Chigas
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Dr. Changming Duan
University of Missouri, Kansas City

Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger
University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Peter Nien-Chu Kiang
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Dr. Stacey Lee
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Vongsay – *Letter to My Unborn Self*

Dr. David Chanpanha Ley
Montgomery County Public Schools

Dr. Bic Ngo
University of Minnesota

Dr. Leakhena Nou
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Mark Pfeifer
Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

Dr. Bounlieng Phommasouvanh
Minnesota Department of Education

Dr. Kalyani Rai
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Dr. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner
Boston University

Dr. Myluong Tran
San Diego State University

Dr. Linda Trinh Vo
University of California, Irvine

Dr. Zha Blong Xiong
University of Minnesota

Dr. Sue Needham
California State University, Dominguez Hills

Dr. Max Niedzwiecki
Daylight Consulting Group

Dr. Clara Park
California State University, Northridge

Dr. Loan T. Phan
University of New Hampshire

Dr. Karen Quintiliani
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Fay Shin
California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Yer J. Thao
Portland State University

Dr. Khatharya Um
University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Terrence G. Wiley
Arizona State University

Dr. Kou Yang
California State University, Stanislaus

Doctoral Student Editorial Review Board

Keo Chea-Young
University of Pennsylvania

Peter Tan Keo
Columbia University

Ha Lam
Arizona State University

Monirith Ly
Texas State University

Vanna Som
Harvard University

Layheng Ting
State University of New York, Albany

Tinou Tran
University of Houston, Texas

Yang Sao Xiong
University of California, Los Angeles

Annie BichLoan Duong
San Joaquin County Office of Education

Polinda Keo
University at Albany

Ravy Lao
University of California, Santa Barbara

Giang Pham
University of Minnesota

Rassamichanh Souryasack
University of California, Santa Barbara

Loan Tran
University of California, Riverside

Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy
Harvard University